



Getting Geographic: Constructing/Interpreting Population Pyramids

Martha's Study Corner

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Human populations are an important part of the study of geography. Not only are people unevenly distributed on Earth [see Activity #8]; they also vary greatly in terms of age and sex distribution. Some countries, such as Ethiopia, have a young population, meaning that a high percentage of the total population is below the age of 15 years. Other countries, such as Spain, have an aging population, meaning that an increasing percentage of the people are older than 65 years.

Understanding the distribution of population in terms of age and sex is important in understanding a country's well-being and the challenges it faces.

Constructing population pyramids

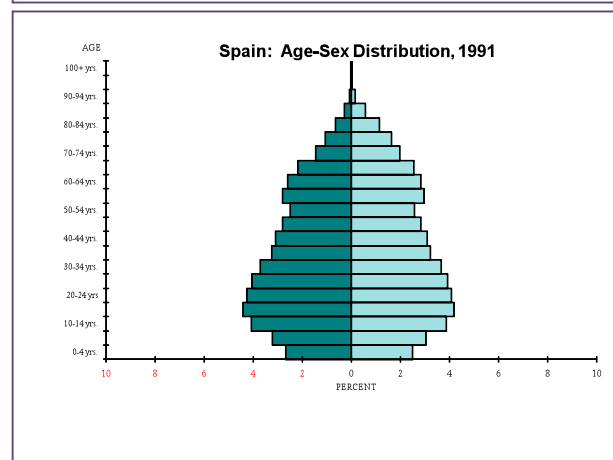
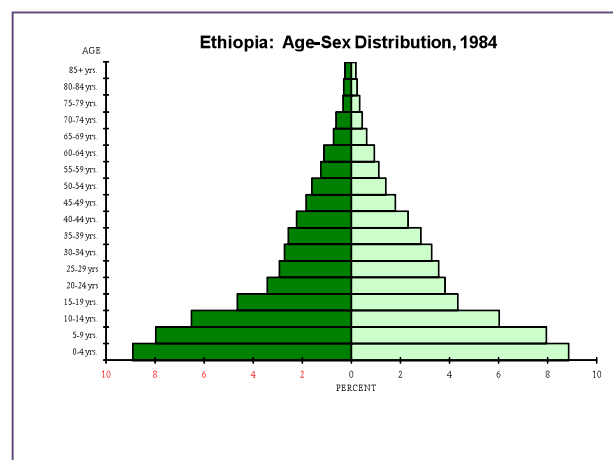
a) Distribute copies of the **Activity #11 Handout #1** and **Handout #2**.

b) Explain that a *population pyramid* (also called an "age-sex graph") is a special type of graph that shows the distribution of a location's population in terms of age groups, called *cohorts*, and sex. Note that it is best to construct population pyramids using percentages rather than numbers since this makes it possible to compare countries with different size populations.

c) Have half the class construct a pyramid for Canada and the other half, a pyramid for Bolivia. Beginning at the bottom of the graph, plot the percent of the population that is 0-4 years and male. Shade this bar on the pyramid and repeat for females, using a different color. Repeat this step for each age cohort until the pyramid is complete.

Interpreting population pyramids

a) Have students compare the pyramids for Canada and Bolivia. How are they similar? How are they different?



Data from U.S. Census Bureau, International Data Base

b) Which age group is largest in each country? How might this affect the quality of life in each country? What challenges might this age distribution create for each country?

c) To learn more about interpreting population pyramids, visit Population Reference Bureau at <http://www.prb.org/>.

d) Data for other countries, as well as for states and even counties is available from the U.S. Census Bureau at <http://www.census.gov>.